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Items for discussion and decision: education statistics

Task Force on Education Statistics (convener: UNESCO Institute for Statistics)

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit the report of the Task Force on Education Statistics. The report reviews the main measurement frameworks, in the field of education currently being used for purposes of data collection at the international, regional or national levels and how they impact on the production and use of statistics. The review also looks at coordination mechanisms among relevant agencies with respect to different stages of the statistical production and dissemination cycle. In addition, the report proposes possible ways to improve coordination; data collection and production and dissemination.

The Commission may wish to express its views on the substance of the report and give recommendations for future work in this area.

* E/CN.3/2008/1.

** See *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2007, Supplement No. 4* (E/2007/24), chap. I.A.

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Report of the Task Force on Education Statistics

A. Background

1. Following the thirty-eighth session of the Statistical Commission and the presentation of the report of Statistics Canada on Education Statistics (E/CN.3/2007/2), it was agreed that a task force on education statistics consisting of interested countries and agencies would be established. The Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was asked to act as convener for the Task Force.

2. In that role, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics hosted a working session in May 2007, together with representatives of the United Nations Statistics Division, Eurostat, Statistics Canada and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. At the meeting the terms of reference for the report were reviewed. As a result of the session, it was agreed that a detailed review and stock-taking exercise, building on the report of Statistics Canada, should seek to identify and prioritize the key issues related to measurement frameworks for education statistics and international coordination mechanisms in terms of data collection, processing, dissemination and use. The draft terms of reference were accepted and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics was given the responsibility to engage experts in order to draft the report.

3. The Task Force was formed by the following seven countries: Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba, France, Russian Federation and South Africa.

4. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics contracted two international experts, Stephen Heyneman and Thomas Smith, both of Vanderbilt University (United States of America), to undertake the study. It was agreed that the review would map out the current state of education indicator frameworks in use nationally and internationally; survey international coordination mechanisms; identify potential gaps relative to emerging policy demands; and provide recommendations to the Task Force on the feasibility of various approaches to fill gaps or to improve international coordination.

B. Study design and activities

5. The study was designed to systematically collect inputs on measurement frameworks and coordination mechanisms from data producers and users at the national (e.g., national statistical organizations and line ministries) and international levels. As of December 2007, the activities described below have been carried out.

1. Survey of member States

6. Using the terms of reference (see annex) for the task as a guide, Mr. Heyneman and Mr. Smith drafted a survey for Task Force members and selected other member countries (in collaboration with the UNESCO Institute for Statistics). The survey focused on the following topics:

(a) The activities (or involvement) of international agencies in the field of collecting and disseminating comparative education statistics, including UNESCO itself and other United Nations agencies, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Eurostat, the World Bank, regional development

banks and regional organizations (e.g., the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations);

(b) The areas where these activities may be coordinated well, where they may overlap and where there may still be gaps;

(c) Suggestions and/or recommendations that would be useful to consider to improve the current practice of collection and dissemination of cross-national educational statistics.

7. The survey requested that respondents provide rubrics or conceptual frameworks used to guide the collection and reporting of education statistics in their countries. If a conceptual framework was not used, respondents were asked how they had made decisions about the kinds of education data that they had collected and reported on.

8. A draft questionnaire of the survey was peer-reviewed and the resulting comments and recommendations were used to revise it. The revised questionnaire was sent to the following Task Force members in November 2007:

Australia	Dennis Trewin and Susan Linacre
Brazil	Carmilva Souza Flores and Gerson da Silva Barrey
Canada	Sange de Silva
Cuba	Antonio Vega Perez
France	Claude Sauvageot
Russian Federation	Mark Agranovich and Serguey Egorenko
South Africa	Pali Lehohla

9. In addition to the members of the Task Force, the national statistical agencies and education ministries in 12 additional countries were sent a questionnaire: Chile, China, Costa Rica, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, Nigeria, Qatar, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

10. The deadline for submitting responses to the survey was 18 December 2007 for Task Force members and 30 December 2007 for the countries listed above.

2. Consultations with international organizations

11. Individual consultations with international organizations were conducted in order to review existing coordination mechanisms among relevant agencies and to propose solutions, if necessary, to avoid duplication and to reduce a country-response burden, especially in terms of the following areas:

(a) Maintaining and implementing (and providing guidance to member States) international measurement standards, such as the International Standard Classification of Education;

(b) Raising the profile and extending core standard-setting work;

(c) Focusing on specific issues, including linking across standards, and treatment of historical data.

12. Towards that end, the consultants are currently in the process of interviewing individuals in international and regional organizations regarding their coordination efforts with respect to education statistics. They are also collecting and analysing conceptual frameworks and other related documents that the organizations use, in practice, to guide their data collections.

13. Interviews with representatives of OECD and Eurostat were conducted in October 2007, and with representatives of the World Bank, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Development Programme and the Statistical Commission, in December 2007. Interviews with UNESCO staff will be held in early January 2008.

C. Timeline

14. The consultants will complete their interviews, review of documents and analyses by February 2008 and will submit a draft report for review by Task Force members and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in March 2008. Based on the comments received, the consultants will revise the report and prepare a final report for the Task Force.

D. Action to be taken by the Statistical Commission

15. **The Commission is invited to:**

(a) **Take note of the activities so far undertaken by the Task Force;**

(b) **Advise on the future direction of work.**

Annex

Terms of reference for the Task Force on Education Statistics

Background

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-seventh session, the United Nations Statistics Division asked Statistics Canada to undertake a review of educational statistics. The report was presented to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-eighth session.

The Statistical Commission:

- Welcomed with appreciation the report, took note of the recommendations contained therein and requested Statistics Canada to provide the full report to all members and observers of the Commission;
- Agreed to set up a Task Force on Education Statistics consisting of interested countries and agencies and asked the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) to be the Task Force convener;
- Welcomed the proposal by UIS to organize an international working session on education statistics as soon as possible in 2007 to provide input to the workplan of the Task Force;
- Requested the Task Force to develop its workplan, begin its implementation and submit a progress report to the Commission in 2008.

Tasks

The Task Force will undertake the following tasks:

(i) further reviewing and analysing the accumulated experience of countries and various agencies.

The paper presented to the Statistical Commission represents the views of one country. It needs to be completed by a deeper analysis of the situation, involving other countries and international agencies, especially on its two major conclusions, i.e., the lack of shared conceptual foundations and limited cooperation.

The framework should build on what currently exists in international agencies and national office and, identify the common and diverging needs of developed and developing countries and international agencies and the possible means of meeting them in the most coherent, comparable and unduplicated way possible.

(ii) reviewing existing conceptual frameworks for international education statistics that have a strong emphasis on outcomes.

The review should cover what currently exists in international agencies and national offices, identify the common and diverging needs of developed and developing countries and international agencies and possible means of meeting them in the most coherent, comparable and unduplicated way possible. The review should pay special attention to the following items:

- *Scope and coverage*
- *Underlying model and relationships between key elements*
- *Identification of definitions and classifications*

(iii) reviewing coordination mechanism among relevant agencies and proposing new arrangements, if necessary, to avoid duplication of tasks and to reduce country response burden.

In a second stage, if there has been agreement on the need for an international conceptual framework, the Task Force may develop said framework and additionally identify a core set of indicators.

Composition

The Task Force should comprise national experts from developing and developed countries and from international agencies (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Eurostat, Statistics Division). The proposed list of countries includes Australia, Brazil, Canada, Cuba and the Russian Federation, which have already expressed their interest in participating, and a country from Africa, most likely South Africa.

The Task Force will be co-chaired by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and Canada.

The UNESCO Institute for Statistics will serve as secretariat of the Task Force, will take care of preparation and reporting and organizing meetings and will maintain regular communications with Task Force members.

Time frame

The international working session on education statistics will be organized by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics as soon as possible in 2007 to provide input to the workplan of the Task Force. The Task Force should start its work before June 2007 in order to present a first report on its activities to the Statistical Commission at its thirty-ninth session, in March 2008.

The final report is expected by December 2008.